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SUBJECT: SENEGAL'S NEW ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL-BLATANT
PATRONAGE

REF: DAKAR 696

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: The recently-created Conseil Economique et Social (CES) is an advisory body tasked with ensuring that the needs of Senegal's people are heard by the government. However, the new CES is no different to a pre-existing CES that President Abdoulaye Wade campaigned against and dissolved in 2000. The 2009 version of the CES is staffed with Wade's loyal supporters and, according to the opposition, a blatant example of patronage. END SUMMARY

Composition and Purpose of the Council

¶2. (SBU) On Wednesday, July 29, President Wade presided over the official installation of the new CES. The CES consists of 80 official members as well as 40 associate members drawn from different socio-professional categories. The chair of the CES is nominated by the President for a renewable five-year term. It is currently headed by Ousmane Masseck Ndiaye a close political ally of Wade who recently lost both his positions as Mayor of Saint Louis and as Minister of State for Decentralization and Local Government. The CES is designed to be an advisory body for the government; its duties are to listen to the needs and grievances of different population groups, "enlighten" the choices of the state, and promote peaceful relations between different social groups. The CES will allegedly focus its efforts on the labor classes and vulnerable populations.

CES - Sounds Familiar

¶3. (SBU) The CES is not a newfound idea as Wade dissolved a pre-existing CES in 2000 after routinely arguing that it was unnecessary and consumed up too much of the government's budget. It had no mandate to control government policy, or to reject existing laws; it could only advise. Wade stressed that, if elected he would eliminate the CES. Following his swearing-in, he did just that but kept CES President, Famara Ibrahima Sagna, one of his closest friends, as his special adviser until March 2004.

¶4. (SBU) On June 19, 2003 the National Assembly approved the creation of the Conseil de la Republique pour les Affaires Economiques et Sociales (CRAES). President Wade appointed Mbaye Jacques Diop as the President of CRAES in June 2004. This ostensibly "new" body staffed with 100 people fulfilled the same role that the CES had before Wade's presidency. While the opposition questioned this decision and remarked that the CRAES was similar to the dissolved CES, Wade provided no reasoning or justification for the creation of the new council.

¶5. (SBU) In 2007, the CRAES published an annual report that was critical on the state of corruption and mismanagement in Senegal's public sector. Wade did not like it, and said as much in both public and private. It was around that point in time that the Mbaye Jacques Diop, the then-President of the CRAES, fell out of favor

with Wade who subsequently told Diop to resign, but Diop refused. As Wade had no legal authority to remove Diop, he circumvented around this hurdle by sending to the National Assembly on August 7, 2008 a bill to disband CRAES.

Opportunities for Patronage

¶6. (SBU) Observers and opposition parties currently echo Wade's own sentiments from the 2000 presidential campaign: the CES is not the key to providing social safety and stability, they argue. Rather, it is wasteful government spending and blatant patronage. In a vein similar to the creation of the Senate, Wade personally selected the members of the newly formed CES. Many of them are former ministers and members of Wade's government, as well as his good political clients and supporters. These members are paid substantially and given numerous perks. Revealingly, not a single member of the CES participated in the 2008 "Assise National". (NOTE: The "Assise National" was a widely-attended gathering called by civil society to call attention and propose remedies to a number of Senegal's problems. The gathering was critical of, and boycotted by, Wade's party. END NOTE)

Divide and Conquer

¶7. (SBU) Institutions such as the CRAES and the CES have been used by Wade to undermine potential future opponents. Rather than fight these people, he co-opts them when possible, removing an enemy and further weakening any opposition. A prime example of this practice at work concerns Mbaye Fall Leye, the President of CUSEMS, a popular teachers' union. Leye was co-opted into the newly-formed CES.

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Subsequently, the coalition of unions to which CUSEMS belonged kicked him out, and CUSEMS itself was split into two, divided between those who support Leye and those who oppose him. By bringing Leye into the CES, Wade not only removed a potential opponent but also severely weakened CUSEMS.

COMMENT

¶8. (SBU) Underneath the lofty rhetoric, the CES is nothing but a patronage tool used by Wade to reward those loyal to him and to "recycle" unpopular supporters. Wade's dissolution of the CRAES is a perfect example of this blatant patronage at work; the moment that it did not serve his interests, he disbanded it. Now that the political class has grown even larger and some of his confidants were soundly defeated in the March 22 local elections, Wade revived the CES/CRAES in order to placate his cronies. In the end, however, what is most worrisome about this episode is the President's continued manipulation of the Senegalese constitution to suit his needs. END COMMENT.

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